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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: improving public-sector effectiveness

Statement submitted by Franciscans International and International Federation of Settlements and Neighbourhood Centres, non-governmental organizations in general consultative status with the Economic and Social Council; and Congregation of Our Lady of Charity of the Good Shepherd, Dominican Leadership Conference, Elizabeth Seton Federation, International Association of Charities, International Presentation Association of the Sisters of the Presentation, School Sisters of Notre Dame, Sisters of Mercy of the Americas, Sisters of Notre Dame de Namur and Society of Catholic Medical Missionaries, non-governmental organizations in special consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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Introduction

"Vision without action is merely a dream, action without vision is merely passing time, but action with vision can change the world." Nelson Mandela

Improving public sector effectiveness requires a vision – a vision of providing quality services for all the public but particularly for the most vulnerable social groups. Using resources to provide public services only for those who can, because of their own wealth and power provide for themselves, turns upside down the notion of public sector. To paraphrase Nelson Mandela's statement: A definite goal without adequate resources is merely a dream; adequate resources without a definite goal squander resources; a definite goal with adequate resources can change people's lives.

International goals and commitments have been well established. The Millennium Development Goals, the Monterrey Consensus, UN Summits and international agreements provide more than enough policy guidelines. GA Resolution A/RES/S-24/2 of 15 December, 2000, *Further Initiatives for Social Development,* already provides an extensive and clear programme for effective social policy. Implementation requires the fulfillment of the financial agreements made at Monterrey. Global finances are more than adequate to fulfill the commitments made. But unequal distribution of global wealth, unjust global structures, particularly in trade and finances, and burdensome debts, prevent many countries from moving toward fulfillment of their goals.

These constraints coupled with lack of political power in a globalized world thwart even those government officials (and we hope there are many) who enter into public service hoping to make a positive difference in people's lives. Often original good will gets diluted or even forgotten in discouragement, cynicism, ambition or greed. A conscious, continuous revitalization of motivation to serve the public good first and foremost, is a primary and indispensable requisite for improving public sector effectiveness. Then, with clear goals and adequate resources, a government further needs to possess freedom to implement plans and direct resources as needed.

Considerations for all Governments

In many countries the majority of citizens are unable to obtain for themselves basic human necessities, such as adequate food and clean water, health services and education. The role of government is, at the very least, to enable society to function efficiently and harmoniously for all, and to ensure that the most basic needs of human life are satisfied. A strong and unswerving commitment to this governmental role is essential.

In order to address adequately the needs of people, it is indispensable that decision makers and service providers be in constant dialogue with the recipients of services. Making assumptions about other's needs often leads to inaccurate assessments, waste of resources, and unsustainable consumption patterns. In addition to ongoing consultation with the recipients of services, effective national planning for poverty reduction is improved by interdisciplinary, inter-agency and international consultation and co-operation.

Effective plans of action are based on the concrete awareness that the unmet needs of one segment of humanity or one region of the earth eventually bring suffering to all peoples. There are numerous examples to illustrate this: the global spread of diseases, poverty- induced violence and terrorism, shared effects of air or water pollution, resource depletion.

A recent study on best practices in poverty eradication points the way to effective public sector interaction with civil society to ensure that the needs of vulnerable people are met.[1] Some of the important points presented include the need for education to empower effective participation particularly in the rural areas, the understanding

[1] Best Practices in Poverty Eradication: Case Studies from the Field. Sub-committee for the Eradication of Poverty of the NGO Committee for Social Development with a Forward by Nitin Desai, former United Nations Under-Secretary-General for Economic and Social Affairs. (2003)

that effective policies must be for the long-term, and that cooperation and collaboration will enhance both the creativity and effectiveness of solutions to service provision.

Finally, to be free to act in ways that benefit citizens, government must be independent from the control of moneyed interests. To ensure such freedom requires legislation and oversight which inhibits corruption and which protects government officials from indebtedness to special interests

Considerations for developing countries

The freedom of developing countries to implement needed reforms and procedures, thus providing for the needs of their citizens, is particularly curtailed today by the control exerted from powerful institutions – be they governments or corporations – who shape the current trade and financial agreements.

It is vital that developing countries regulate carefully and strictly all privatization. In particular, effectiveness requires that they protect the delivery of the most basic human services (such as, food and safe water provision, health services, and education) from privatization.

The multilateral demand for equal participation of developing countries in global decision-making, particularly in the areas of trade and finances, as was evident at Cancun, must continue in order that they be able to negotiate policies which enable them to fulfill their mandate to their own citizens.

National governments should co-ordinate political, economic, and social policies and programs by bringing together representatives of major administrative agencies frequently along with other stakeholders.

Citizens' expectations of accountabil .y and transparency must be encouraged, respected and facilitated through effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms.

Another important element to improve public sector effectiveness in the developing countries is promotion of South-South sharing of expertise, technology, and successful methodologies.

Considerations for developed countries

Because of their greater power and resources, developed countries have greater responsibility for public sector effectiveness in the sense described above. In the first place, their own public sectors should be effective in the provision of basic services – services which are human rights of all people. In some cases the provision of services to special populations such as those living in the rural sector, immigrants, refugees and those without adequate personal resources is insufficient. This ignores the reality that the people in these populations are indeed a rich resource for any country. One step toward fulfillment of this responsibility is careful monitoring and regulation of markets and corporations so that the welfare of workers and conservation of natural resources are given first priority.

Besides the responsibility developed countries have within their own public sectors, they also have a responsibility to promote effective public sector development in those countries of the world which lack adequate resources.

Many developing countries are financially unable to provide needed services for their citizens because of excessively heavy debt servicing. Promotion of debt cancellation, debt swap, and debt relief in poor countries is indispensable for providing needed resources for the public sector.

The establishment of an independent arbitration process under the direction of the UN would provide greater justice in the settlement of issues related to sovereign nations' debts.

Free markets contribute to development only in those countries which have free access to markets for their goods. Movement toward truly free, open markets in which developing countries are able to access the markets of the developed countries is needed.

Access to markets is meaningless, even domestically, if foreign subsidies on produce drives selling prices below local production costs. Therefore, domestic agricultural subsidies must be eliminated to allow poorer countries to compete.

Some commitments regarding ODA, particularly those made at Monterrey, are still awaiting fulfillment. Poor countries and wealthy countries alike would benefit from the healthy global economy which could be created if all nations were enabled to contribute their own natural and human riches.

Finally, given that historically the current international financial institutions, whose policies are dominated by the most wealthy nations, have succeeded in widening the gap between the haves and the have-nots, developed countries have a role in calling for and supporting reform of these institutions.